

# Measuring Up Nanaimo

Accessibility & Inclusion issues facing persons living with disability

## Introduction

The mandate of this study, launched by the Measuring Up Nanaimo Task Force was twofold: to study transportation issues encountered by people with disabilities and to examine how those issues affect their employment situation. Secondly, to study the current attitudes in the business community towards employing and serving people with disabilities.

The main objectives were to:

- Define the most important issues
- Create public awareness of these issues
- Make short term and long term recommendations based on the results of the study

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This study was conducted by Anne Middleton and supported by the  
Measuring Up Task Force for a period of 5 months

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## **Executive Summary**

This Task Force recommends support for the RDN 5 year plan to expand both the public and custom transit services. (See Appendix #5). More fleet vehicles and more Handi Dart vans on our roads, seven days a week are indicated. We support initiatives to allocate certain service vans to those with daily commitments such as work, volunteering, or frequent medical regimes. We would encourage a subsidized program for low income Handi Dart clients and support the continuation and expansion of the Taxi Saver program.

The City of Nanaimo Works Department should continue their efforts to upgrade all bus stops to accommodate “kneeling buses”, to correct curbing that prohibits wheelchair use, to clear sidewalks and pathways, and to install benches and shelters at all bus stops. The task force supports the allocation of “audible chirps” and Braille schedule wrappers for all main intersections.

It is the conclusion of the Task Force that education programs to build awareness of the value of hiring people with a disability should be initiated. Employers need to be alerted to this untapped resource in the community. Business owners and managers need to open discussions with service agencies to develop strategies to include people with a disability as employees and as clients through simple changes to their business environments.

Finally, the continuation of the website [www.accessnanaimo.ca](http://www.accessnanaimo.ca) is strongly advised as a forum of communication between people with a disability and local government, the business community, and each other. The public response to this site has been overwhelming and reflects the needs of people with a disability to feel they have a voice and that someone is listening.

## **Methodology of Study and Media Campaign**

The purpose of the study was to examine and learn how our community presents barriers to the daily lives of persons living with a disability. The research process consisted of two separate surveys: one a transportation survey (**Appendix 1**) and one a business survey (**Appendix 2**).

The **Transportation Accessibility Survey** was conducted in person at various bus stops and during ride-alongs on the regular bus system and the Handi Dart vans, and was answered by individuals attending programs presented by various service agencies, as well as on-line at [www.accessnanaimo.ca](http://www.accessnanaimo.ca) by people with a disability and the general public. The target group for this survey was persons with a disability who have short or long term employment goals.

**The Employers/Business Survey: Accessibility** was distributed through the Nanaimo Chamber of Commerce. Over 800 business surveys were mailed. Business owners were asked to fill out a hard copy of the survey, or to go on-line.

A separate **Opinion poll (Appendix 3)** was sent to local service agencies whose clients are persons with a disability for their specific input: CNIB, Vancouver Island Deaf and Hard of Hearing Association, Vancouver Island Health Authority, MS Society- Central Chapter, Triumph Vocational Services-Nanaimo, Clay Tree Society for People With Developmental Disabilities, and the British Columbia Paraplegic Society.

Radio interviews were aired on local radio stations discussing the survey, and public service ads were shown on A Channel approximately 30 times. In addition, two ads were created for newspapers, asking, “How do you get to medical appointments?” and “Is your business accessible?” In both cases people were directed to the website to fill out the questionnaire. The Nanaimo Bulletin and The Daily News ran front-page stories, covering the survey and directing people to the website. The website, [www.accessnanaimo.ca](http://www.accessnanaimo.ca) became a forum for questions and suggestions from persons with a disability and information resource links were added, volunteer groups were formed etc. This site has developed into a valuable central link for persons with a disability in the community.

Task force members made presentations to Nanaimo City Council and others attended Regional District of Nanaimo transportation meetings and forums between March and June/ 08 to investigate current and proposed policies. Some of the other public and private resources that were consulted include: City of Nanaimo, Engineering and Roads, B.C. Ferries, Nanaimo Airport, Grey Hound Bus Service, Wheels for Wellness, Taxi companies and Care One Medi Transit. Please see **Appendix 4** for a comprehensive discussion of these resources' present and future transportation services.

**In all 148 Transportation Surveys and 95 Employer and Business Surveys were completed. 7 Service Agencies returned Opinion Polls.**

## **Discussion of Survey Results**

### **Transportation Survey**

Because this survey included those riding the regular bus system, those riding the Handi Dart system, and the general public at large, total percentage figures show the cross section between users of the transportation system and those who do not. For instance 49% of all respondents answered that they use public transportation, 50% said they did not. However over 60% of respondents used some type of mobility aid. The comments included in Appendix 1B, reveal some recurring themes. One of the frequent comments for all respondents was that the bus service was not frequent enough, with connections not synchronized, to be a good substitute for owning their own vehicle. Many people with a disability preferred supplying a car and relying on a driver to get them to appointments, work or other scheduled commitments.

The Handi Dart system was both praised for their caring and patient drivers and criticized for their limitations in availability and hours of operation. Those respondents with a visual impairment voiced a need for: improved lighting, benches, and covered bus shelters at bus stops and Braille schedules and chirp signals at all intersections. Users of wheelchairs requested cleared pathways, and sidewalks, covered shelters, improved curbing, and more frequent and longer hours of operation for the Handi Dart service.

## **Business Survey**

Businesses surveyed displayed a lack of awareness regarding facts surrounding people with a disability. Almost 60% of employers felt they could not employ people with a disability because of: space limitations, required heavy work or other accommodations they might need to make. (See Appendix 2B-Reasons). Some employers gave the reason that employees needed to work all day at a computer, which would suit an employee in a wheelchair, while others felt that the physical demands of the job made it impossible for a person with a disability, but were obviously not thinking of the hearing impaired or other impairments. Most businesses also were uncertain about their accessibility for people with a disability but only 28% were willing to have a physical assessment done of their premises. Possibly they feared an assessment would open the door to legislation requiring them to make expensive renovations. However 66% were interested in being part of a website listing accessible businesses. The comments seemed to reflect an interest in information on how businesses could voluntarily improve their accessibility to the disabled.

## **Opinion Poll Results**

The participation of the various service agencies gave a wealth of information on the specific challenges and needs of their clients. Only a few of the agencies' clients were able to utilize the regular transportation system. The others relied on the Handi Dart service and voiced the same praise and criticism of this system that was voiced by the polled riders and those responding to the survey on-line, i.e. not enough vans, not frequent enough, not enough hours of operation.

## Recommendations

1. Support the recommendation of the RDN expansion plans to add more Handi-Dart vans and allocate some specifically to shuttle clients for scheduled routine work, training or therapy appointments. Support the RDN 5 year plan for expanded hours of operation.
2. Support the RDN expansion of all transit service and hours of operation to provide more frequent service on weekends and longer hours of operation for late shift workers.
3. Propose and support that Nanaimo City Works Dept. create a budget for; upgrading the bus stops still not wheelchair accessible, constructing curb ramps where there are none, improving lighting, and providing benches and shelters where missing. Support and encourage private participation in providing the last two items.
4. Support the new allocations of “audible chirps” and Braille “wrappers” for all main intersections.
5. Support the proposal that Taxi saver coupons become part of the RDN budget. Find funding for subsidy of the Handi Dart coupons to be issued by approved service agencies.
6. Support clearing sidewalks of plantings in the downtown area.
7. Support initiatives to assess business premises for accessibility.
8. Support initiatives to educate business owners on the values of hiring people with a disability. Invite service agencies to participate in this.
9. Continue the funding of the website [www.accessnanaimo.ca](http://www.accessnanaimo.ca) to provide a central on-line information resource for persons with a disability.